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TAGS: KPKO PGOV PREL SP UNSC

SUBJECT: SPAIN URGES FRANCE TO BUDGE ON WESTERN SAHARA

Classified By: Political Counselor Kathleen M. Fitzpatrick,
reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) The Spanish Foreign Ministry's chief diplomat for Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and African issues told visiting EUR/WE office director Kathy Allegrone October 1 that Spain has edged "closer toward neutrality" on the Western Sahara issue and is urging France to budge from its firm support for Morocco's position in the conflict. Spain believes the UNSC must amend the Baker plan to allow for further negotiation since "Morocco simply refuses to accept the Baker plan." The MFA's desk officer for North Africa told poloff separately that although Spain wants SGSR de Soto to jump start negotiations, the Spanish are concerned the international community will ignore the issue because de Soto does not have James Baker's star power. The Zapatero government is convinced any final resolution must recognize Moroccan sovereignty but also autonomy for the Sahrawis. End summary.

Western Sahara Process Off Course

¶2. (C) Alvaro Iranzo, the MFA's director general for the Mediterranean, Middle East and Africa told Allegrone and poloff that the Western Sahara matter was off course and the Zapatero government was trying to take corrective action. "Any solution to the problem must be agreed, not imposed," commented Iranzo. In order the prod the parties to move beyond the current impasse, the UN Security Council would need to pass a resolution that renews MINURSO and gives SGSR de Soto a mandate to negotiate changes to the Baker Plan. In terms of a solution, Iranzo said "No plan makes sense without some kind of autonomy for the Sahrawis, but at the same time the Moroccan flag must fly over the territory." Separately, the MFA's North Africa desk officer told poloff that even though Spain would like de Soto to spur further negotiations, Spain is worried that without former Secretary Baker's star power, the international community will ignore the problem and the dispute will simmer indefinitely.

France Should Follow Spain's Lead

¶3. (C) After first denying Spain had shifted its long-standing support for the Polisario, Iranzo later admitted Spain had modified its position "slightly" in the hopes that France would do the same. The first order of business is to achieve some degree of "rapprochement" between Algeria and Morocco," and that would only happen if France does as Spain has done -- move somewhat toward neutrality. France has always backed Morocco fully but "Paris needs to be more flexible.⁸ Iranzo did not predict how likely France was to budge from its support for Morocco but assured us the Zapatero government was working hard to make this happen. "Spain has adopted a more pragmatic approach that does not antagonize any of the principal parties to the dispute. We are hoping France does the same," explained Iranzo. The MFA's North Africa desk officer commented separately to poloff that the long-running dispute in Western Sahara is the major obstacle to good Algerian-Moroccan relations and is therefore a matter of abiding interest to both France and Spain. Iranzo said that once France has revised its position, Madrid would be looking to Washington for further support in resolving the conflict.

You Can Bring the Horse to Water . . .

¶4. (C) In the end, however, Iranzo admitted the serious challenge facing Spain, France and others seeking a solution. The Polisario insists the Baker Plan be implemented but Morocco refuses to do so. "You can bring the horse to the water, but you can't make it drink," Iranzo said, "it appears

that right now neither horse wants to drink and ultimately they must do so voluntarily."

Comment

15. (C) Iranzo's remarks are consistent with FM Moratinos' statements several days before to the Spanish Senate that the Baker Plan was a dead end because Morocco would not accept it. But Iranzo was more forthcoming than Moratinos has been on Spain's new "realpolitik" approach to the conflict -- Moratinos has not yet admitted Spain has altered its support for the Polisario. Spain's new, more pragmatic approach toward Moroccan interests makes sense only if Madrid succeeds in getting Paris to be equally pragmatic about Algeria's and the Polisario's interests. Despite the Zapatero government's well-known reorientation of Spain's foreign policy toward France, it remains to be seen whether Spain can exercise any influence over its northern neighbor on an issue of significance, such as Western Sahara.

ARGYROS